

Influences of Physical and Social Neighbourhood Environments on Children's Physical Activity and Obesity

Childhood obesity and some of the associated behaviours including poor eating habits and physical inactivity, tend to persist in adulthood. It is now acknowledged that the social and physical environment may play a significant role in addressing this global epidemic. Studies have assessed this hypothesis, but not considering the central role youth play.

Data was collected from 650 children during the first phase of 'Healthy Passages,' a community-based study of health risk behaviours and health outcomes in children. In parallel, data was collected during interviews with the community to assess social cohesion, parent's willingness to intervene if children misbehaved, relationships with neighbours, and neighbourhood safety. Land-use and traffic in neighbourhoods were also considered.

The results indicate that increasing neighbourhood safety and fostering social cohesion among children and with neighbours was a key determining factor for engaging in physical activity. In turn, this was associated with lower rates of overweight or obesity. Social factors, not only physical environments, should be a priority consideration when developing health policies and interventions to address childhood and overweight obesity.

Franzini, L., Elliott, M., Cuccaro, P., Schuster, M., Gilliland, M., Grunbaum, J., Franklin, F. and Tortolero, S., 2009. Influences of Physical and Social Neighborhood Environments on Children's Physical Activity and Obesity. American Journal of Public Health, 99(2), pp.271-278.